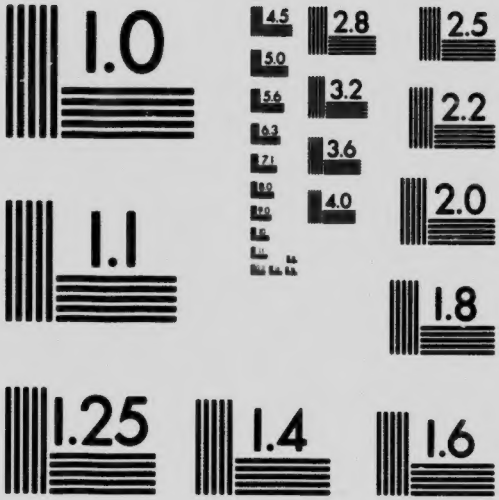

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FEATURES OF OUR FAITH, POSITION AND PRACTICES

PLAIN INSTRUCTIONS.

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Introductory

In every parish many persons of mature years will be found who, while ready to present themselves for Confirmation, are prevented by circumstances from attending the preparatory Classes. For them the following instructions are designed, though they may also be found helpful to others.

One of the great incidental blessings of Confirmation is the opportunity thereby afforded of definite teaching in regard to the 'Catholic Faith,' the practices of personal Religion, and the position of the Church.

Where such information can be given, the fortunate recipients should have a clear understanding henceforth of their Belief, Position, and Duty, and be equipped for all emergencies.

For this purpose our Church sets forth her Catechism; and while older persons cannot be expected to learn it by rote, they should certainly investigate the different great truths expounded therein, viz :—The Christian Covenant, Christian Creed, Christian Duty, Christian Prayer, and Christian Sacraments. An attempt to deal practically with these points is made in the following pages, which should be read slowly and thoughtfully, the scriptural references being carefully examined.

NOTE—These Instructions may profitably be read by **ALL PERSONS**, without special reference to Confirmation, as briefly explaining Doctrines, Rites and Customs popularly misunderstood.

It is worth a little effort, to learn the truth about these things.

CONFIRMATION.

Confirmation means the Act of making firm—of strengthening.

It is this in two respects : (1) God confirming us by His Holy Spirit, "the Comforter" or Strengthener : (2) we confirming the promises made at Baptism. Of these the first is the more important and the Scriptural part : let us consider it.

THE GIFT OF CONFIRMATION

Read Acts viii. 5-18. Notice here that a Deacon preaches Christ ; people believe and are baptised (v. 12). But this is not enough (v. 16), so the Deacon stands aside, and Apostles (now Bishops) confirm by means of the laying on of hands* and prayer (v. 15-17). Result, the Holy Ghost is given, (v. 17).

Another Confirmation. See Acts xix. 1-6. Same outward means used, same result follows (v. 6). But we have no instance of confirmation being administered by any but members of the highest order in the Ministry.

See also Hebrews vi. 1-2, where the "Laying on of hands" is placed among the "principles of the doctrine of Christ." How can we reasonably accept the other five "foundations" enumerated here (Repentance, Faith, Baptism, etc.) and reject Confirmation ? See also Ephesians i. 13.

Why should we desire in Confirmation to receive the Holy Ghost ? See What He does—convinces and guides (Jno.

*NOTE—All throug the Bible the laying on of hands is used in connection with the conveyance of different blessings. See Gen. XLVIII. 9; 14; Num. XXVII. 18; Mk. X. 16, etc.

xvi. 7-14) ; teaches (xiv. 26) ; gives power (Acts i. 4-8) ; intercedes (Romans viii. 26-27) ; beautifies character (Gal. v. 22.) He comes first visibly into the Church—(Acts ii. 1-4) ; is given afterwards in confirmation (Acts viii. 19.)

See our Lord's promise, (Lk. xi. 13) "shall give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." At Confirmation, in addition to the prayer of the Divinely appointed officer, the prayers of the whole congregation are concentrated upon us. Then, surely, must we receive the promised Gift. Our Father, who knows and loves us, offers us this Divine help in Confirmation, coming down to support, guide and cheer us. Is it not a responsibility to reject this Heavenly Visitor, as if we did not want God's companionship, and could do without His help ?

THE RATIFICATION

The second part of Confirmation (coming first in the service) is the ratification of our Baptismal vows. See Bishop's question "Do ye here.....ratify, etc." This feature was added at the end of the Reformation period (1662) to Confirmation, which (as in the Bible narratives) would be complete without it. Still, it is a serious question, and requires thoughtful consideration.

Baptism involved a Covenant between God and us with promises on both sides. Our promises were made provisionally on our behalf. Now it is for us to ratify these—to 'put our own signature' to the covenant. Examine these promises :—

(a) Renunciation of the World, Flesh and Devil. The point at issue is this—are we content to drift along through life, driven hither and thither by different impulses of these evil powers, or are we resolved to make a determined resistance

to them—to 'renounce' and give up what is wrong, as bidden by John Baptist (Matt. iii.), and after example of our Lord (Matt. iv.) ?

(b) Our second promise—to believe all the articles of the Christian Faith. (See p. 8.) God has laid down a certain path of definite religious Faith—are we resolved to walk in it ?

(c) Thirdly we promised to obey God's holy will and commandments. See the Ten Commandments (Exodus xx.), the Sermon on the Mount (S. Matt. v., vi., vii.) etc., etc. In the Bible and through the promptings of conscience we are pointed to a definite path of duty to God above and man below. Are we resolved to walk in this path ? Whether we accept it or no, it is our duty and high privilege. Only in obedience to God's Holy Will and Commandments can we live a true and beautiful life.

THE PRIVILEGES OF BAPTISM

In Baptism we were made (a) members of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 12, 27.) (b) Children of God (Gal. iii. 26, 27), (c) Inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven (Rom. viii. 17.) What does this mean ? That God, instead of letting us wander in darkness, placed us in the light—that instead of a bad start with all against us, He gave us a good one with much to help us : that He adopted us into His Family—the Church, and allowed us to grow up amid the blessed influences of the Divine Home. And although we may have not appreciated or used these privileges—although we may have gone into a 'far country,' we need not despair. We still belong to the Divine Family, and can say "I will arise and go to my Father."

It is one thing to have been granted an inheritance, and

quite another thing to enjoy the actual possession of it. The Father has placed us in His Family, but if we would dwell there we must wear the white dress of the Family and share in its high and beautiful and holy life. We must help to maintain the family honour, and to fight the family battles. God calls us now at Confirmation from an unthinking and careless or indolent life to understand our true position, enjoy its privileges, and face its responsibilities. Is this hard? He comes down from Heaven (in the person of the Holy Spirit) to enlighten our eyes and make us strong to do His will.

CONVERSION

From the above it will be evident that Confirmation presents a priceless opportunity for "taking stock" of life, its responsibilities and possibilities. It is too often forgotten that the privileges of Holy Baptism are granted on the assumption of the baptized persons' Repentance and Faith, which are at first guaranteed by their Sponsors, but "which when they come of age, themselves are bound to perform." Have we ever "performed" this definite obligation by consciously realizing our sins, giving them up, and turning from them to GOD in a spirit of loving Faith? These are two factors in what is sometimes called "Conversion" which is the great spiritual need of the thoughtless and the proud, the self-willed and the sinful. To our great loss in the past, this spiritual act (of Conversion) does not seem to have been comprehended as a pressing need for Church-men, who have too often remained cold, self-satisfied and unspiritual—repelled, perhaps by popular distortions of this truth. And yet with us, as with others, a definitely spiritual life is a

reality and can be tested—"If any man be in Christ he is a new Creature" (2 Cor. v. 17.) As to the time or occasion of Conversion we need have no anxiety. The only question is "What is my attitude now? Am I now (to use Prayer-book terms) in the attitude of renouncing, believing and obeying?" If we have not done so, now is our opportunity to turn to God at His call and with His help. As "the Way" there stands before us Our Lord Jesus Christ (Jno. xiv. 6.) Very lovingly He calls us—"Come unto Me; learn of Me." (St. Matt. xi. 28, 29.) "Follow me (Matt. xvi. 24.) "Confess me before men" (Matt. x. 32.) 'T. a loving Saviour Who calls us; 'tis a beautiful life to which we are alled! And if it be not easy in obedience to these calls to give up our kind of life and to adopt, and continue in, His life, we may in this Ordinance and henceforth seek and obtain the mighty aid of the Holy Spirit who "helpeth our infirmities" (Rom. viii. 26.)

PRAYER

Members of the Divine Family are privileged to hold converse with their Father in prayer, and this converse must be suitable in (1) inward spirit, and (2) in outward form. In inward spirit effectual prayer must be earnest (Lk. xi. 9), believing (Mark ii. 24), unselfish (*Our* Father), according to the will of God (Matt. xxvi. 42), and such as we can consistently offer in the name of Christ, (Jno. xvi. 23.) The true spirit of prayer finds complete expression in the "Lord's Prayer" in which rising, as it were, to the throne of God, we pray first for His glory and then for our own proper needs.

In outward form we are to (1) pray *humbly* (realizing our unworthiness) Lk. xviii. 10. (2) pray *definitely*—with definite aim, in definite place (Matt vi. 6), in definite words (Matt.

vi. 9) with definite act of forgiveness (Matt. vi. 15,) (3) Pray *perseveringly* (Lk. xi. 5-8, xviii. 7.)

The Constituent parts of Prayer are these : (a) Confession, (b) Praise and thanksgiving, (c) Petitions for all things necessary for souls and bodies, (d) Intercession for the Church, friends, etc. All these should find a place in our prayers.

Note.—On consideration it will be seen that our PRAYER-BOOK is framed on the above principles. Observe the following different parts—(a) Confession ; (b) Praise (Psalms, Canticles, etc.) ; (c) Instruction (the Lessons and Sermon) ; (d) Petitions (following Creed) ; (e) Intercessions (following 3rd Collect.) But its leading feature is that of humbly expressed but lofty *praise* coupled with petitions for God's glory and the welfare of His Church. The Prayer Book is the manual of the Christian Army assembled on parade in honour of the Divine Commander. To ensure action which shall be proper, united and effective, each soldier is instructed as to what he is to say aod do. Spirit, voice and body have each a duty to God and are expected to perform it reverently and heartily. But the outward form is valuable for what it enshrines. And the thoughtful, earnest worshipper will gradually come to perceive and 'catch' the spirit of calm, lofty and chastened devotion which lies behind the service, hidden from the formal and the unthinking. Omitting the Absolution, Morning or Evening Prayer may be said by a layman or by a woman. And particular parts of it may be profitably selected for private devotion.

THE FAITH

This is summarized in the Apostles' Creed, which is a chart indicating the chief truths contained in the Bible.

1. Do I believe in God the loving Father and Creator ? (Mal. ii. 10.)

2. In God the Son, our Saviour? As having revealed God to man, and reconciled men to God, the largest part of the Creed deals with His wonderful life and work. (See the Gospel histories.)

3. In God the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier, (see p. 4.)

4. The Holy Catholic Church. (See below.)

5. The Communion of Saints. (See p. 11.)

6. The Forgiveness of sins (1 Jno. i. 7-9.)

7. The Resurrection of the Body (1 Cor. xv. 22-23, Matt. vi. 14.)

8. The Life everlasting (Jno. v. 24.)

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Church was prepared by Jesus Christ as His Body in which all Christians should be united to Him, and through which He would continue His work in the world. As Adam's body was formed before the breath of life was breathed into him, so the body of the Church was first formed by our Lord, and included the Apostles, the Seventy, and the Disciples. Then, after careful training, the commission was given "as my Father hath sent me even so send I you," (Jno. xx. 21.) Then the ranks of the Apostles were filled up, (Acts i. 26.) Then life was breathed into the Body by the Holy Ghost on Pentecost (Acts ii.) Then the Holy Ghost was given to new converts in Confirmation (Acts viii.) Then the Church, thus filled with life, spread gradually to different parts of the world, mainly through the missionary work of St. Paul. (Acts x.-xxviii., etc.) Still, notice that it is one undivided Catholic Church with Branches in different countries, and not intended to be divided (1 Cor. i. 13.) In the second or third Century the Church spread to Britain, whither another mis-

sion was afterwards sent from Rome under Augustine A.D. 597. These two missions worked in different parts of Britain, and were finally united and organized as the National Church of England under Abp. Theodore, A.D. 673.

During the middle ages the English Church was in communion with the Church of Rome, and was influenced by it. Protests continued to be made against Papal interference, and the first clause of Magna Charta (A.D. 1213) declared "The Church of England shall be free."

In the 16th and 17th Centuries the Reformation was gradually accomplished. The whole body of the Church—Bishops, Priests, Deacons and People—united in purging the Church of accretions and superstitions, and in returning to a simpler and a purer faith. The Bible was translated, and the Prayer-book compiled from the Latin service-books already in use, and the Church of England—the same identical Church as before, but reformed—offered in either hand to the Anglo-Saxon race the Bible and the Prayer-book.

On the Continent of Europe and in Scotland, however, this great movement partook of the nature of a *revolution* rather than of a reformation. Instead of the Church reforming herself, the foreign Reformers felt themselves compelled to go out of the Church, leaving behind great portions of the Christian heritage. Thus they lost the order of Bishops with their authority to ordain and confirm, the ancient Liturgy, the Festivals and Fasts of the Christian year, and other treasures. On the other hand the Roman Church in the Council of Trent opposed the Reformation, and daringly added new superstitions. The Church of England, therefore, took a middle position between the corruptions of Rome and the Revolutionary reaction of extreme Protestantism. She reformed herself and took a Protestant stand against

corruption, preaching the Word of God in its simplicity. At the same time She remained a true Branch of the Church of all ages, retaining the three-fold Ministry, the Liturgy, Sacraments and other priceless possessions of the Church Catholic.

We cannot now recount the subsequent history of the Church with all its eventful vicissitudes. Her life has been like that of a human being, not always up to the same standard but variable—sometimes weak and depressed, at others strong and vigorous. But, whether strong or weak, the Holy Spirit has always dwelt within Her, bringing the life of God into *some* contact with all members in vital connection with Her. In this Church the hands of the Lord Jesus are upraised through the ages in strengthening and blessing those who look to Him. The Church is indeed marred by many defilements, but the Fount of cleansing is ever flowing in Her midst, and one day She shall be presented to Her Lord "a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." (Ephes. v. 27).

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

After fixing our attention on the Church as a whole, we pass, in the next article of the Creed, to the relationship existing between individual members. And we are called upon to believe that there is a living connection between all God's children, whether members of His Church here, or in Paradise.

"One family we dwell in Him
One Church above, beneath."

A realization of this relationship brings us into inspiring contact with the saintly and heroic lives of every age and every country. In the great Service of Christian Fellowship we closely unite "with Angels and Archangels and all the company of Heaven." Helped by those on the heights above we stretch out a helping hand to those around and below us.

Under this head comes the duty of CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, so loudly called for to-day. This attitude is an integral part of Religion (1 John i 7) and should find practical expression of all kinds. Our Lord Himself has made the application to salutations (S. Matt v. 47) ; to hospitality (S. Luke xiv. 13) ; and to small acts of kindness (S. Matt. x. 42).

As a Religious duty, then, strive to put away coldness of heart, and stiffness of demeanour ; and enter into the spirit and practice of Christian Fellowship.

But remember that, while a realization of our common membership in the Church does call for such actions, it does not *depend* on them. The Church is not a Social Club, and the fellowship of the Church is, after all, not that of the ball-room with its superficial courtesies. Rather is it the more undemonstrative but deeper comradeship of the Naval and Military Service. As a soldier in the Divine Army look to the great Captain, and be content to follow him even though the path be lonely. While careful to do your duty to others, do not weakly depend on their attitude to you.

Our Religion should have its foundation not on man, but on God.

THE HOLY COMMUNION

HISTORY

In ancient times God taught man that He must be approached through different sacrifices. The greatest of these was that of the Passover (Ex. xii. 3) which commemorated the salvation of the first-born and the deliverance from Egypt. This great sacrifice Jesus Christ transformed into the Holy Communion (Lk. xxii. 15-20) which henceforth became the great service of the Gospel, celebrated every Lord's day (Acts xx. 7.) It was regarded as the hearthstone of the Christian family, around which all members gathered in loving communion with God and with one another. In later ages of spiritual laxity and drought this great Service was neglectfully allowed to sink into the back-ground, and its place taken by other services (Morning and Evening Prayer) which had been originally compiled for daily use in religious communities, in subordination to the great Divine Service of Holy Communion which marked the Sundays. Though this custom is still prevalent, the Holy Communion is gradually being restored to its proper place, and in increasing numbers the Father's children gather, like the Disciples of old, to celebrate the weekly Eucharist.

This is not now possible in all Churches, especially in rural districts, but, in so far as their privileges will allow, all new Communicants should in this as in other matters adopt regular systematic habits founded on Scriptural truth rather than on human custom.

Whether able to communicate frequently or infrequently, however, the main point to be aimed at is the realization and devotional use of this great Service as one of the chief Divinely-fashioned Instruments in the Divine Workshop for the gradual moulding of human character and the glorifying of God.

ITS NATURE The Holy Communion is a Memorial of Christ's Sacrifice, by which we bring it before ourselves, our fellow-men, and chiefly before God. In it we plead with Him, that for the sake of the crucified Saviour our sins may be forgiven and we ourselves made more fit for His life and service here and hereafter :

"For lo, between our sins and their reward
We set the Passion of Thy Son, our Lord."

We often say that acts are more effective than words. This is not only a solemn Act, but also one designed and commanded by God (1. Cor. xi. 24-26). It is a translation into action of the words "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Again, the Holy Communion is a direct means by which we become united to Jesus Christ, "one with Him and He with us" (See Jno. vi. 51). In each Communion, as we bend in lowly adoration before the loving Saviour, we should absorb more and more of His character, His spirit. Lastly this service is intended to be the strongest bond between members of the Christian family, the highest expression of the Communion of Saints" (1 Cor. x. 17.) Drawing nearer to God we are to draw nearer to our brethren.

PREPARATION We are to "examine" ourselves (1 Cor. xi. 28) whether—(a) we truly repent of past sins ; (b) have a lively faith in God's power and willingness to forgive those sins, and (c) are in charity with all men. If we are not in charity with any one, it is our duty to forgive him (which surely in view of the example of Jesus Christ we should be able to do) and to make a personal effort towards reconciliation (Matt. v. 23, 24.) As a further evidence of charity the Church expects every communicant to bring some offering of money, however small, which is usually given to the poor.

Suitable prayers in preparation for the Holy Communion are the first Collect in the Service (for purity) and the "Prayer of humble access" beginning "we do not presume to come to this Thy Table."

Receiving the sacred elements, think of your Saviour on the cross, plead His sacrifice on behalf of yourself and others, hold communion with Him in spirit, and offer praise and thanksgiving. Then, if there be time, read part of the Gospels for Holy Week or Communion hymns.

All should obtain for further help a "Communicants Manual," such as that by Bishop How (20c). If the course of preparation in these manuals be thought too long, certain portions, which are found helpful, may be selected and marked for use.

THE LAYMAN'S COMMISSION

Confirmation is really an ordination to the Priesthood of the laity (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.) Henceforth you are commissioned and empowered to take your full part, particularly in the great Service of the Holy Communion, and generally in the maintenance and extension of Christ's Kingdom on earth. Do not speak of what "they should" but "of what we shall do." In humble confidence take your position and keep it You have been appointed an agent for the Church. Gird yourself for the work. Give your Clergyman your active sympathy and support. Give a regular weekly contribution by Envelope. Exercise your ministry in the Choir, the Sunday-school, or beside the sick-bed. Do not be afraid at times to speak for Christ and his cause—for the right and against the wrong. Invite and call for your neighbours to attend the services of the Church, and say or do something to make strangers feel at home in the Father's House. In places or

families where no service is held say Morning and Evening Prayer or at least portions of the services yourself, and ask others to join you. And while you are thus doing your work for the Kingdom at home, do not forget its extension abroad. You are also commissioned to take some part in preaching the Gospel of Christ to all nations (Mtt. xxviii. 20.) If you cannot go yourself, support by your prayers and offerings those who have gone to do a great work which is yours as well as theirs.

PRAYER TO BE USED BEFORE CONFIRMATION

O GOD, by Whose merciful Providence the Holy Church continues to observe the doctrine of Baptism and the Laying-on of hands, we beseech Thee to be with Thy servant, our Bishop, when, after the example of Thy Holy Apostles, he shall administer in this parish the Holy Rite of Confirmation. Help us, we beseech Thee, truly to prepare for this great Blessing, and to receive it aright ; that being strengthened with might by Thy Spirit in the inner man we may never be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, but may more earnestly fight under His banner against sin, the world and the Devil, and continue His faithful soldiers and servants unto our life's end ; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

TO THE READER.—In the above pages there have been brought before you important Truths, many of which are hidden from multitudes to their great loss. If you believe these Truths, speak and read about them to others, as you can find opportunity, and thus begin your privileged work as a Commissioned Agent of the Church of the living God.